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woods surrounding 'Buckberry Inn.' The trees were decorated with strings of cranberries and popcorn. Apples and suet were tied to the branches; nuts, grain and water were placed on the feeding-shelf. The bathing and drinking pool which Class No. 2028 built in the corner of the yard had been kept supplied with water.

"During the Christmas holidays eight members of the society went with me to Swope Park to take a bird-census. It was a clear, cold day, seventeen above zero, and the ground was covered with five inches of snow. We spent an hour in the woods and fields, counting eighty birds representing thirteen species. We then built a fire in the fireplace of the shelter house, where we roasted 'wieners' and cheese and discussed our tramp. We decided

to spend two hours next Christmas in taking a census just as the older Audubon members do."

In a million homes of our country, and more, today the children know the correct names of the common wild birds. They spy upon their coming and going and are ever ready to take up stout arms to defend these their pets of the door-step and garden. In common with their elders they read of the birds in the daily press, the magazines, the story-book and those pages of printed verse whereon the poets of every land have interwoven the melody of the singing birds with their witchery of rhyme. The birds constitute a part of our natural heritage and it is our privilege to cherish and preserve them to the end, that we may thus add to the sum total of love and happiness.

*T. Gilbert Pearson*

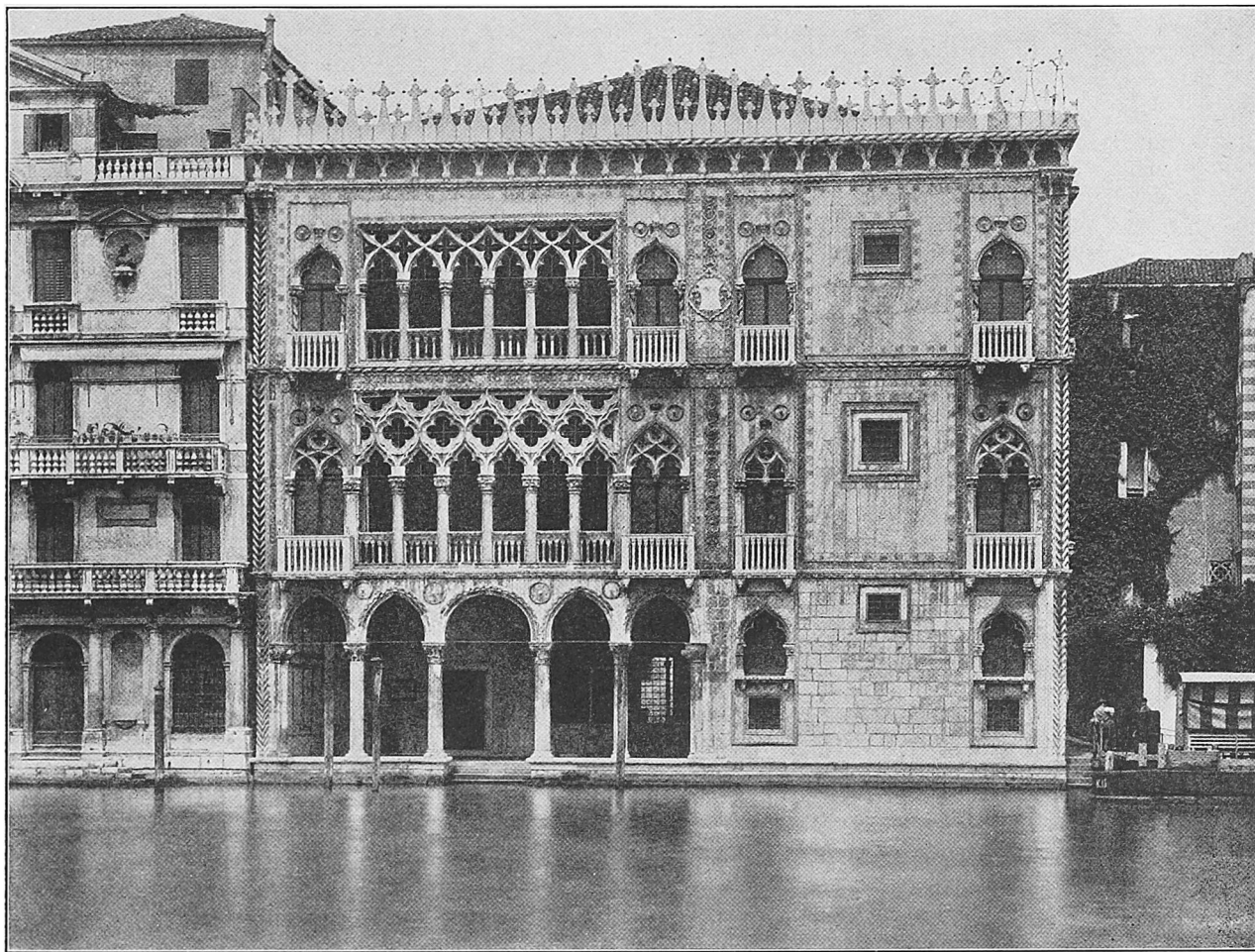
## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PRIVATE HOUSE IN THE WORLD

BY COMMENDATORE DR. ARDUINO COLASANTI

*Translated from the Italian by Arthur Bennington*

THE Ca' d'Oro or Golden House on the Grand Canal in Venice has been called the most beautiful house in the world. With all the wealth of works of art that it contains, it has just been presented to the Italian nation by Baron

Giorgio Franchetti, who bought it several years ago and restored its interior, collecting from all over Venice those parts that had been torn out and sold by previous owners. The writer of the following article is one of the Directors General of An-



THE VENETIAN HOUSE CALLED CA' D'ORO, SAID TO BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PRIVATE HOUSE IN THE WORLD

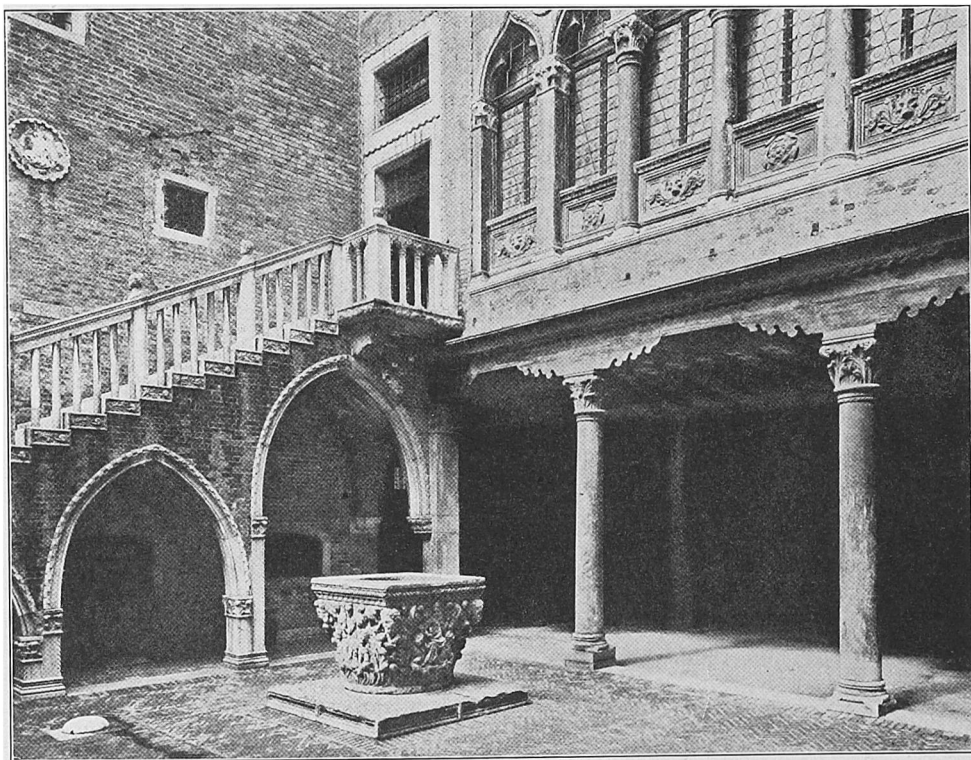
tiquities and Fine Arts of Italy, and one of the most authoritative art critics in the world. He was selected by the Italian Government to take charge of its exhibit at the San Francisco Exhibition, where he was one of the judges who made the final awards for works of art.

Francesco Sansovino may have been exaggerating when he wrote in 1581, that of all the cities of Europe, Venice possessed the grandest buildings; but today it is not too much to say that the Ca' d'Oro or Contarini Palace at S. Sofia on the Grand Canal is the most picturesque, the most precious, the most fascinating private mansion in all the world.

When on an unstated day in the year 1421—for the first receipted bills of Matteo Roverti, stonemason of Milan, domiciled at S. Felice, Venice, bear

real architect was that powerful aristocracy, that wealthy, busy *bourgeoisie* of merchants and navigators who had in those buildings at once their monuments and their fortresses. The artizans successively went down to their graves leaving compasses and chisels as sacred heirlooms to other artizans, seeking rather the satisfaction of genius than the allurements of fame, caring not at all if their names were lost in the effulgence of their creations.

However this may be, in the contract which Contarini closed on January 18, 1422 with Giovanni Bono, stonemason and his son, by which he agreed to pay them one hundred and forty ducats a year and to supply them with an indefinite quantity of wine, he did not leave the two artizans any free



INTERIOR COURT OF THE CA' D'ORO

the date May 21 of that year—Marino Contarini began to build the marvelous house, there must already have existed in the same place a house, certainly more modest but not small, if, as it seems, it bore the name of *domus magna*—the Big House. And some of the architectural and decorative features of that earlier building were incorporated in the Fifteenth Century reconstruction.

Who was the architect of the sumptuous and wonderful palace, the magnificence of which merited the title of *Ca' d'Oro* (golden house)? Some give the credit to Giovanni and Bartolommeo Bono; others prefer the name of the Milanese Matteo Roverti, which appears foremost in the documents and always at the head of a large group of artists, almost all Lombards.

Probably both are wrong, and the Ca' d'Oro, like the Doge's Palace which was being built in those same years, and like several other public and private edifices of the period was the work of several persons and not of an individual. Their

initiative, and he seems to have reserved to himself the supreme direction of the work. But even he could not at that time have had a precise and definite idea of the building he wanted to erect, for he hoped that it could be finished within the year, while it was not until August 4, 1424—undoubtedly because its scope was enlarged—that the Boni began the work, and this went on until 1434, when Giovanni di Francia finished embellishing the façade with gold.

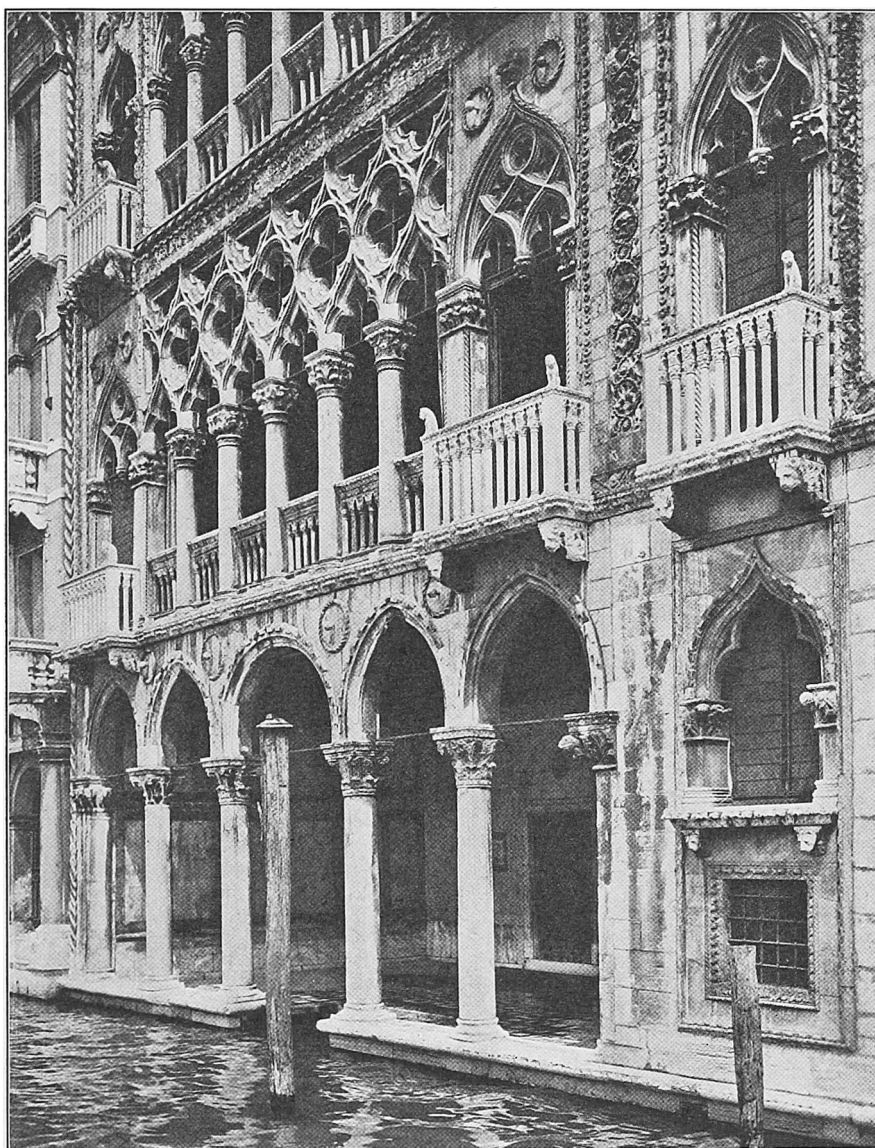
Venice, the city that has no sisters, was built in that waste of waiting waters as a refuge from hordes of medieval invaders, drunk with conquests. Her first sons were content to populate the deserted seas with their spreading red sails and to break the silence of the air with the clanging of their first bells. Even when she had grown into a great conquering republic, Venice could not, like Florence the heiress of Etruscan civilization, become enthusiastic over the records and ruins of the classic world. She created for herself a very special architecture, the result of an adaptation and an inter-

penetration of Gothic and Romano-Byzantine forms; only after notable delay did she yield to the influence of the new ideas that prevailed in all the rest of Italy.

Even the Ca' d'Oro, therefore, although erected at the height of the Quattrocento, recalls in its mass the typical Venetian palaces of the Thirteenth Century, made up of porticos and loggias flanked by or enclosed between two wings placed like towers on the same frontal line—as appears from the

ing example of a type which in those first thirty years of the Fifteenth Century was beginning to be diffused throughout Venetian art.

The rich tracery of the story below is evidently derived from that of the outer loggia of the Doge's Palace; but if in the latter a severe architectonic ideal prevails, in that of the Ca' d'Oro the decorative genius of the first Venetian Renaissance triumphs admirably, influenced by innumerable and picturesque combinations of Gothic art.



DETAILS OF EXTERIOR OF CA' D'ORO

numerous examples reproduced in a famous print by Jacopo di Barbari. But in the Ca' d'Oro one of the wings is lacking, so that the symmetry of the building is broken, and the result is: two wings differing in appearance, united by bands recurring in the several stories, by the cornice and by the repetition of certain architectural details.

The proportions of the ground floor are the same as those of the first floor. The pillars of the central loggia, including their capitals and bases, are little higher than the areas of tracery (*campo traforato*). The upper band of tracery is the most strik-

The asymmetry of the general distribution of the façade is repeated also in various architectural details. The dimensions of the openings are different and the vertical height of the colonnades of the loggias and those of the portico do not correspond. But these and other irregularities of construction do not constitute defects, as some imagine. On the contrary, they are elements that add to the fascination of the marvelous edifice. In the Doge's Palace also the broad and ponderous façades rest with admirable architectonic anomaly upon the aerial pointed arches of the loggias. Again, the arches

of the Loggia of Orcagna at Florence are not of equal size, and these very inequalities are an admirable coefficient of beauty. In no art more than in architecture does the secret of genius dwell more in the invisible; for beside mathematical laws that are translatable into scholastic rules there are other laws of a metaphysical nature which often give the lie to mathematics and which genius unconsciously obeys.

Although exalted for its beauty in every book that describes Venice and Italy, the Ca' d'Oro has had vicissitudes sad enough. Little by little time spoiled its fragile external decoration; unscrupulous owners, successors of the Contarini, altered and tormented its interior to carve new dwelling-places therefrom or despoiled it for gain. In the Eighteenth Century the limit was reached when the adjacent Coletti (now Giusti) Palace was permitted to put up a wall touching and thus blinding the western apartments.

The magnificent monument suffered still more about 1847 when the famous dancer Taglioni, who owned it as well as several other Venetian palaces, entrusted it to the architect Meduna. At that time the portico of the court-yard opposite the entrance was destroyed, its pilasters being sawn off and made into staircases; capitals, carvings, pinnacles and other decorative elements were removed to others of the dancer's palaces; the open staircase that led up from the court-yard to the first floor—one of the most characteristic features of the ancient Venetian palaces—that wonderful staircase which Ruskin had extolled above all other Gothic monuments of Venice, was torn down.

But Fate willed it that a notable man, a true lover of his city, willing and able to lavish limitless generosity on the protection of her memories and her beauty, determined to buy the glorious house, to restore the parts that had been changed and with rare artistic intelligence to gather and bring back to it such of the features that had been removed as he found it possible to reacquire. This man was Baron Giorgio Franchetti.

He rebuilt the outer staircase, he recovered the graceful well on which Bartolommeo Buono, while still a youth, had carved the Cardinal Virtues seated on the backs of Venetian lions. With infinite patience and at enormous expense, he restored the apartments and gathered within them a collection of works of art, including Titian's "Seated Venus," Paris Bordone's "Sleeping Venus," Luca Signorelli's "Flogging of Jesus," tables and coffer decorated by Jacopo del Sellaio, a man's portrait by Van Dyck and that "San Sebastian" by Mantegna which, compared with the refined elegance of its brother in the Imperial Museum at Vienna and the penetrating humanity of that in the Louvre, offers us a new type in the Mantegnesca iconography of the martyred saint that excels the other two, and that by its plastic power reminds one of Michelangelo's "Prisoners."

When he had done all this, in silence, without ul-

terior motives, actuated solely by his cultured mind, Baron Franchetti considered his work complete and, with a simple and nobly modest gesture, he presented to the Italian government the superb collection of works of art and the stately palace in which they are housed!

Beside the pure bareness of the contemporary Florentine palaces and the haughty mien of those of Rome, with their great windows flung wide to menace slaughter or to announce triumphs, the Ca' d'Oro seems like the loveliest festival of color, the richest and most spontaneous efflorescence of stone brought forth as by the laws of music from the lagoon. With its balconies open to the fresh sea breeze, to all the quiverings of life, to all the songs and all the flights of the air; with its arches turned like the fabric of a dream, marked below by shapely pillars rising like the stems of flowers, above by the subtle intertwining of Gothic curves; with its stones bejeweled by time that seem to evoke the tears and joys of enchanted happy climes; with the airy garden of its pinnacles, its stalks, its traceries surrounded by the flights of doves; with its marble façade that scintillates every evening until the twilight fades away, the Ca' d'Oro contains and expresses perfectly the soul of the Venice of the Renaissance. All Venice with its light and its color, with its fascination and enchantment, with its love for every form of beauty, with the dreams of its painters and the serenity of its autumnal soul, is here.

And it is through this potent quality of evocation that the name of the wonderful monument, bestowed by the people and consecrated by the usage of centuries, has become as magical as that of a constellation of stars.

Besides this, the Italian government has just received several very important gifts of works of art. At Naples, Signor Beniamino Rotondo has presented a collection of 122 paintings and statues in which all the principal Italian artists of the Nineteenth Century are represented. At Rome Signorina Hertz has given to it a gallery of paintings among which is the "Annunciation" by Filippo Lippi, one of the most exquisite and charming that this master ever painted. At Rome also, Prince Fabrizio Ruffo di Motta Bagnara has made the nation a present of a library of 50,000 volumes and a precious collection of art objects. In Florence likewise Herbert Percy Horne an Englishman has bequeathed to it in his will a Fourteenth Century palace, painstakingly restored by him, with all its rich furniture, library, manuscripts, tapestries, drawings by old masters, and a gallery museum that boasts works by Domenico Beccafumi, Bartolommeo Caporali, Pietro Lorenzetti, Filippino Lippi, Benozzo Gozzoli, Luca Signorelli, and Desiderio da Settignano.

But by far the most precious of all is Baron Franchetti's gift of the Ca' d'Oro to the Queen of the Lagoons.

*Arduino Colasanti*

